DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 133 991 FL 008 021

AUTHOR Steinberg, Danny D.
TITLE Egalitarian Surnaming: A Psycholinguistic Challenge. Working Papers in Linguistics, Vol. 7, No. 4, July-August 1975.
INSTITUTION Hawaii Univ., Honolulu. Dept. of Linguistics.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 5p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Family (Sociological Unit); Grandparents; Language Patterns; *Language Usage; Marital Status; *Marriage; Parents; *Psycholinguistics; *Sex Discrimination; *Sociocultural Patterns; Sociolinguistics
IDENTIFIERS *Names; *Surnames

ABSTRACT

The present practice of surnaming, by which the wife takes on the name of her husband and the children take on the name of the father, favors one of the sexes over the other. In this paper, the egalitarian surnaming system (ESS) is proposed. This system deals equally with the sexes and also serves important social functions, such as providing a basis of family identity for the nuclear group (same surnames for mother, father, and children) and for identifying a line over generations (same surnames for grandparents and grandchildren, for example;. According to ESS, both the wife and the husband retain their before-marriage surnames but add the surname of the spouse just prior to it. Female children are given the dual surname of the mother, and the male children the dual surname of the father. When the children marry, they replace the first of their two surnames with the final surnames of their spouses. (Author/CLK)

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EGALITARIAN SURNAMING: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC CHALLENGE

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DANNY D. STEINBERG

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

ABSTRACT

Our present practice of surnaming where the wife takes on the name of her husband and where the children take on the name of the father favors one of the sexes over the other. In this paper, a system, the Egalitarian Surnaming System, is proposed. This system deals equally with the sexes and also serves important social functions such as providing a basis of family identity for the nuclear group (same surnames for mother, father, and children) and for identifying a line over generations (same surnames for grandparents and grandchildren, for example).

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EGALITARIAN SURNAMING: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC CHALLENGE [1]

DANNY D. STEINBERG

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Our present practice of surnaming where the wife takes on the name of her husband and where children take on the name of the father obviously favours one of the sexes over the other. What is needed is a system which will not only deal equally with the sexes, but one which will also serve the same social functions, such as providing a basis of family identity and solidarity for the nuclear group (same surnames for mother, father and children) and for a line over generations (same surnames for grandparents and grandchildren, for example). In this paper the author proposes a system, the Egalitarian Surnaming System, which attempts to deal with all of these problems.

Surnaming at Marriage

According to the Egalitarian Surnaming System (hereafter, ESS), both the wife and the husband retain their before-marriage surnames but add the surname of their spouse just prior to it. Thus, if Allan Brown (aB) and Cynthia Davis (cD) marry, their names become Allan Davis Brown (aDB) and Cynthia Brown Davis (cBD), respectively. Since the woman retains her own surname in this process, in contrast to the present traditional system, such a device prevents any possible feeling of loss of identity. At the same time, because both spouses include the other's surname into their own, a bond of solidarity is provided. Thus, not only would no party suffer as the result of the ESS proposal, but both would stand to gain.

Surnaming of Offspring

According to ESS, female children will be given the dual surname of the mother, and the male children will be given the dual surname of the father.[2] Thus, if a daughter and a son were born to our married couple, Cynthia Brown Davis (cBD) and Allan Davis Brown (aDB), and the children were given the names Faye (f) and Edward (e), respectively, then the daughter's full name would be Faye Brown Davis (fBD) and the son's full name would be Edward Davis Brown (eDB). As a result, both the Brown and Davis surnames have an equal chance of being carried on while, at the same time, the nuclear family can maintain an identity by name since all members will have the same two surnames with only the order of those surnames differing.

For Americans, among whom the practice is not unusual, the ESS allows for a son to be given the same name as the father, as does the present system. The ESS, however, has the advantage though that it allows for identical mother-daughter naming, as well. In the mother-daughter case, the practice of adding a generation distinguishing marker, Jr or a numeral, may also be continued. Thus, for example, a Patricia Taylor Stone may have a daughter who is named Patricia Taylor Stone, Jr.

A proposal that the daughter take on the surnames of the father and that the son take on the surnames of the mother would be just as egalitarian as the proposal made above. The ESS proposal made above might be more readily accepted by the public, however, since it does allow that sons will carry the final surname of the father. Such a social consideration may be paramount in the minds of many. Another tradition-preserving feature of that proposal is that it allows for a continuation of the present "Jr." system. Some change in that system would be necessary if offspring took on the surnames of the parents of the opposite sex.

Surnaming when Offspring Marry

If Faye Brown Davis marries, she will replace the first of her two surnames, that of Brown, with the final surname of her husband. Thus, if she married Isaac Johnson (iJ) her name would become Faye Johnson Davis (fJD). If Faye's brother Edward Davis Brown marries, he will replace the first of his two surnames, that of Davis, with the final surname of his wife. Thus, if he married Greta Harding (gH), his name would become Edward Harding Brown (eHB).

Effects of Egalitarian Surnaming over Generations

Let us consider the effects of surnaming over generations comparing the present traditional system with the proposed ESS. Figure 1 shows, for each

FIGURE 1 GOES HERE

system, the effects of surnaming over three generations. The results show for the four individuals of the third generation that, for the traditional system, only two (kB and lB) have names of their grandparents (aB and cD) while, for the ESS, all four (kHB, lBH, mDJ, and nJD) have names of their

grandparents (aB and cD). That is, the Brown (B) and Davis (D) surnames occur only with Kevin Brown (kB) and Lana Brown (lB), according to the traditional system, while those surnames occur with Kevin Harding Brown (kHB), Lana Brown Harding (lBH), Max Davis Johnson (mDJ) and Nina Johnson Davis (nJD). The ESS is thus superior to the traditional system because identification of family line is continued with more individuals. There is, of course, a cost here, that of individuals having an extra name (a minimum of three names for individuals under the ESS and a minimum of two under the traditional system), but such a cost is quite low. Since most individuals are given three names, anyhow -- two first names and one surname -- the only change ESS requires is that one of the first names be a surname instead.

Summary

Egalitarian surnaming for the sexes may be achieved by the application of two relatively simple principles of naming:

1. At marriage, both the bride and the groom adds the final surname of the other prior to their own final surname.
2. Male children are given the last two surnames of the father and female children are given the last two surnames of the mother.

Footnotes

1. I am indebted to Miho Tanaka Steinberg and Katherine Linduff for their helpful suggestions.

2. The ESS may be applied to offspring whether or not the parents are legally married.